

OHIO ARCHIVES

THE HISTORY of the public records of Ohio is similar in many respects to that of other states. From the time of the admission of Ohio in 1803 until quite recently the state archives were preserved by the office of origin or some other office charged with their care. It is common knowledge that records are jeopardized by their being moved incidental to changing the seat of government, as well as by fire and other natural causes. It has been said that three moves are equivalent to one fire.¹ Ohio has had four capitol buildings in three different cities and one disastrous fire.

Little attention was paid to the care and preservation of the state archives before the passage of an act in 1927² which permits the transfer of records from any state official, department, bureau, or commission to the custody of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. Richard T. Stevenson of Ohio Wesleyan University made a survey thirty-five years ago³ in which he recommended the establishment of a "central agency for the care and use" of Ohio public records. An act passed in 1904⁴ to create a bureau of inspection and supervision of public offices, and to establish a uniform system of public accounting, auditing, and reporting under the administration of the auditor of state, was among the few attempts looking toward better record keeping and preservation. Ohio statutes which, in a broad sense, might be considered "archival legislation" deal with: How copies of certain records are made competent evidence in court; penalty for altering public documents; restoration of lost or destroyed records; reclaiming land where records have been lost; on going out of office, the county recorder shall leave to his successor the seal of office, all books, etc.; provision for county commissioners to transcribe a worn or defaced record so that it shall have the same legal force as the original.⁵

The library of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical So-

¹ Christopher B. Coleman, "Indiana Archives," in *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, 1 (October, 1938), 201.

² *Laws of Ohio*, CXII (1927), 108.

³ "A Preliminary Report on the Ohio Archives," American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1906, II, 165.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Throckmorton's Annotated Code (1926) of Ohio*, Secs. 154-59, 2479, 2493, 2756, 3610-3614, 8557, 11500, 12345-12367, 13088.

ciety is the legally constituted depository for the archives of the state by the 1927 statute, although many of the state departments have remodelled their basement storage rooms in recent years for semi-current and current records. The society is a state-supported institution, but in the fourteen years that its library has housed and arranged state archives, and served public officials and other qualified searchers, no provision has been made in its budget for special equipment or personnel. In other words, much of the noncurrent record of the state is being preserved, and telephone requests from state officials are being answered, without cost to the state of Ohio.

Governor Vic Donahey began the movement in 1927, after the passage of the permissive legislation, by sending much of the non-current record from the executive department to the newly constituted archives division of the state historical society. The executive records consist mainly of correspondence, 1803-1928; letter-books, 1860-1913; shorthand notes, 1893-1903; the General Record, 1803-1928; Appointments, 1803-1928; General Acts, 1804-1851; Special Acts, 1807-1851; Justice of the Peace Appointments, 1836-1852; Requisitions for Extradition, 1805-1866; Requisitions, 1876-1920; Restorations, 1881-1916; Petitions for Pardon, 1806-1908; Pardon Records, 1831-1921; Notary Public Commissions, 1840-1928; and Notary Bonds, 1835-1870.

The secretary of state soon followed suit by sending much of his noncurrent record. He retained corporation and election records to which his staff often refers. Stevenson had reported in 1906 that he found the usual care evident in this office, but that there was a lack of due order in the disposition of the manuscript journals of the General Assembly, "which are piled up in one of the rooms set apart for the use of the stationery department, and evidently need better arranging and care." *The Inventory of the State Archives of Ohio, Secretary of State*, issued by the Historical Records Survey in 1940, indicates a much improved condition in the storage rooms of this department in the statehouse, and the manuscript journals, referred to as inaccessible in 1906, are now easily accessible in the archives; but what Stevenson could not know then was that the journals of the Senate and the House of Representatives are missing from 1803 to 1837. This was attributed to the fire which destroyed the statehouse on February 1, 1852, until the writer recently discovered a letter written in 1836 in the executive correspondence of Governor Robert Lucas. The letter was written by John Brough, a Civil War governor

of Ohio who was concerned over the fact that there was no continuous official record of the proceedings of the General Assembly, except in the printed journal. He wrote:

The course of proceeding which custom has established is simply this:—The Clerk prepares his Journal through the day—always in haste—His messages, Reports, resolutions and every available thing are tacked on with Wafer and altogether it forms, in appearance at least, a rather singular mass. It is inspected by the Speaker, read to the body and passed immediately to the State Printer. This is the end of the record, for you may go to the office of the Printer and if the original can at all be found, you are likely to find it in more pieces than of which it was originally composed, than otherwise. . . . Our Courts of Record are required to keep in *their Books* a faithful record of their proceedings and these faithfully to preserve—Why not the Legislature?⁶

Soon after this plea for better care and preservation of legislative records, that body apparently made provision for an extra clerk to transcribe the journals into a permanent record, and these exist from 1838 to date.

The archives of the secretary of state consist of the House and Senate journals, of Engrossed Acts of the General Assembly, 1800-1899; Senate bills, 1854-1895; Acts and Resolutions, 1874-1890; Senate resolutions, 1882-1915; Senate reports, 1836-1852; House reports, 1842-1850; Stationery Accounts, 1837-1907; etc.

The treasurer of state's records in the archives consist mainly of letter-books, 1846-1873; Appropriation Journals, 1858-1909; Cash Journal, 1803-1918; General Journal, 1871-1903; Receipts and Disbursement Record, 1854-1907; Appropriation Ledger, 1880-1909; Treasury Receipts, 1817-1858, and Vouchers, 1802-1897. From the auditor's office there are some warrants, but the bulk of his record is kept in his office and storeroom because of frequent reference particularly to land records.

The records transferred from the adjutant general's office are particularly complete for the years before the first World War. They constitute letter-books and correspondence, 1861-1865, 1888-1901; Telegraph Dispatches, 1861-1903; Military Elections, 1806-1847, 1861-1865; Military Court Martial Records, 1811-1815, 1847, 1861-1865, 1896; Muster Rolls, 1807-1815, 1861-1865, 1877, 1889-1900; Morning Reports, 1861-1865, 1898; Rosters, 1861-1865; Descriptive Rolls, 1861-1865; Register of Discharged Sol-

⁶ John Brough to Robert Lucas, October 29, 1836, in Ohio State Archives, Executive Documents, Box 66.

diers, 1861-1865; Quarter-master General's records (invoice books, day books, journals, and ledgers), 1861-1908; G.A.R. Correspondence, Muster Rolls, and Post Adjutants' Reports, 1882-1905; Register of Soldiers' Claims, 1861-1870; Records of the O.V.I. in United States Service, 1861-1865; and many others.

In 1935 the Department of Public Works transferred several tons of records pertaining to the surveys, bids, construction, and operation of over eight hundred miles of Ohio's canal system covering the period from 1825-1915. In addition to original surveys and plat-books there are correspondence, vouchers, collectors' accounts, superintendents' accounts, and records of tolls both of the canals and the national road through Ohio.

The situation in Ohio is not as good as it might be. Granted that state historical societies and commissions in many other states have the custody of public archives, it remains a cardinal principle that state archives should be viewed as a distinct function of the state government.⁷ They remain the official record of the office that transfers them under a permissive statute and the historical society or commission assumes a tremendous responsibility, even if a trained person is available to take care of them. The responsibility is greater when the state assumes no additional share of the money necessary to provide adequate facilities for their proper housing, arrangement, and administration. One important asset that the historical society, as a custodian of state archives has, is that it is usually nonpolitical and in this conforms to another of the cardinal principles of archival practice.⁸ Ohio needs a public archives commission or a separate agency of the state government charged with the proper housing, care, and administration of the state archives. Eventually Ohio, like Alabama, Illinois, Maryland, Rhode Island, and some other states that have seen the light, will construct a public archives building of its own. Until the authorities are aware of the need of such action, the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society will continue to give needed space and time to the best possible care and administration of the state archives.

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⁷ Charles M. Gates, "The Administration of State Archives," *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, 1 (July, 1938), 132-133.

⁸ *Ibid.*